

VZCZCXRO9792
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0996 0920808
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 010808Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6579
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000996

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/31/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SURREAL END TO KIDNAPPING OF GOI SPOKESMAN

Classified By: Political Counselor Matthew H. Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Poloffs, the director of the Embassy Office of Hostage Affairs (OHA), and MNF-I Colonel Timothy Clapp of the Energy Fusion Cell greeted a gleeful Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly as he arrived at Assassins Gate on March 31 at 2100, minutes after his kidnappers released him. Sheikhly, Government of Iraq (GoI) spokesman for the Baghdad Security Plan and one of the finest dressers in the GoI, was unkempt, unshaven, and sporting one-piece white pajamas. Poloff conveyed to Sheikhly the Ambassador's greetings and congratulations on his release. Sheikhly was with his brother, Ziad Sheikhly, who had negotiated with the kidnappers to release Tahseen in front of the Iranian Embassy, the only place the kidnappers felt they would be safe enough to avoid capture -- their final stipulation before agreeing to release their captive. Speculation as to the reasons for the kidnappers' decision to free Sheikhly without apparently receiving ransom money, and without achieving their stated political aims, included: obedience to the alleged demand by Muqtadr Al-Sadr (MAS) that Sheikhly be released; fear that widespread media, military and government attention to the case could lead to their arrest; or even a political gesture to build goodwill with the public and the GoI following the MAS nine-point declaration of March 30.

¶2. (C) However, OHA Director Peter Ford described the happy circumstances of this release as "extraordinary," and the Embassy political counselor aptly dubbed them "surreal." Sheikhly, who said his captors were "a bunch of criminals and mobsters who I have to admit treated me rather well," agreed to conduct an interview April 1 with Ford and a representative of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to help the USG learn as much as possible about the tactics, techniques and procedures employed by the kidnappers, who are widely suspected to be affiliated with Jaysh Al-Mahdi.

¶3. (C) MNF-I Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll and Baghdad PRToffs greeted Sheikhly at the Rashid Hotel, where COL Clapp, Ahmed Chalabi, Deputy Prime Minister Barhim Salih and Sayid Jabor of the Office of the National Security Advisor had earlier helped to lodge 22 of his family members. Sheikhly and his brother expressed particular gratitude to COL Clapp, PRToff Mike Ayar, the OHA, and the other PRToffs and poloffs who had worked hard to help secure Sheikhly's release and to support his family during his captivity. As Sheikhly shook his head in disbelief, he noted that he had been in captivity for "115 hours" -- to which an on-looker replied, "Sounds like a good book title." Shortly after Sheikhly checked into his hotel room, he returned to the lobby, laughing, to complain that he was staying next door to Adnan Al-Dulaimi, the Tawafaq Front block leader recently held under house arrest under charges related to terrorism.
CROCKER